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An examination of both the plight of the humanities and present reasons for a measure of "tempered optimism" is conducted. A profile of the graduate student in the humanities provides a sketch of his qualifications, attitudes, and progress. Increased financial aid, the establishment of the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities, and the extension of interdisciplinary cooperation found in many area programs are cited as evidence of the increased growth and importance of the humanities. (BN)

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THE RENASCENCE OF THE HUMANITIES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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IN THE past fifteen years, the word most frequently associated with the humanities was "plight"—certainly not anything as sanguine as "renascence." In text and in titles *The Plight of the Humanities* was so commonly cited that the words were on the way to becoming a cliché, if not what the linguist calls an inseparable compound. Of course, the meaning of the word "plight" depended upon the person who was using it. To the teacher of the humanities it meant academic and public disinterest in humanistic studies, reduction of their practitioners to second-class citizenship, dwindling class enrollments, and most of all, lack of financial support. To the less emotionally involved critic the word meant the loss of contact of the humanistic scholar with reality, the absence of a basic philosophy, the fragmentation and particularization of his learning, the triviality of his research—in short, the general aimlessness of his disciplines in a world where aimlessness had become a major crime.

Through a quarter of a century, I confess that I have made my contributions to this literature of despair. In 1938, long before the plight fell upon the humanities, I wrote an article entitled *The Humanities in the Scientific World*, an epic of frustration and doom. Twenty-six years later, in 1964, I wrote the sequel, under the title *The Rudderless Ship*, to which the sympathetic editor of THE GRADUATE JOURNAL added the significant subtitle *Without a Course, Without a Star*. And now, after only two more years, the time has come for me to recant, to admit that

the rudder of the ship is undergoing extensive repairs, that many men of good will are at work charting a course, and that the star is breaking through the clouds. Two years of self-analysis by the practitioners of the humanistic disciplines and the concentrated campaign for the establishment of the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities have brought about such changes, both internal and external, that a measure of tempered optimism is now permissible. We may, indeed, hope the renascence of the humanities is imminent, that perhaps it has already begun.

If this is true, then the context for my remarks has radically changed. Whereas the economic needs of the humanities in the past called for argument, exhortation, and pleading, we have before us today the accomplished fact that the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities has been established, the initial appropriation has been made, the officers of the Endowment have been appointed, and the headquarters have been opened and have begun to function. We might, if we really believed it, say that our troubles are over, sit back smugly, and wait for Federal largesse to cure our ills. But we know that this is no time for even moderate gloating. It is rather a time to examine our past and our present as objectively as possible, to diagnose our faults, to assess the potentialities of the new instrument that the Federal Government has provided, and then to make some cautious projections for the future. And since the symposium is principally oriented toward the student rather than toward the professor or the curriculum, I shall try to conduct this examination, as far as possible, from the student's point of view. We should, therefore, perhaps begin by establishing a profile of the graduate student in the humanities.

Despite the fact that sometimes we hear the complaint that the humanities do not draw the best graduate students and that the highest talent is skimmed off by the natural sciences, there is considerable evidence to the contrary. Robert H. Knapp, in his book THE ORIGINS OF AMERICAN HUMANISTIC SCHOLARS, says:

> It appears that the humanities are claiming their share of top intellectual material both at the undergraduate and graduate levels and that they are exceeded to a meaningful degree only by the physical sciences and perhaps by psychology.

In the first place, they are drawn from a considerably larger pool of un-

dergraduates than students in other disciplines. The annual total of baccalaureates in the humanities is exceeded only by education and the social sciences. On the other hand, the percentage of these humanistic bachelors entering graduate schools is much lower than of those in other fields of study. From this fact one may infer that entering students in the humanities are more carefully selected, not necessarily by graduate admissions officers or department chairmen, but perhaps also by themselves. The availability of vastly more financial support for students in the sciences provides awards to many applicants below the very highest quality level, while in the humanities only the most distinguished students can count on fellowships. In the national open competitions, however, like the Woodrow Wilson, Danforth, and NDEA Title IV, students in the humanities carry off a far higher percentage of awards than their absolute numbers warrant. It may be argued that they are given preference by the selection committees because of their relative impoverishment, but I still have to see such a committee withhold an award from a superior chemist to give it to an inferior historian. It is a safe assumption, therefore, that the quality of graduate students in the humanities is at least as high as that of students in other fields of learning—if not actually higher than in some.

The baccalaureate origins of these good students also provide some interesting food for speculation. Something over one half of all Ph.D.'s in the humanities in the past twenty years took their bachelor's degrees in less than 4 percent of all baccalaureate-granting institutions. In other words, of the 1,489 colleges and universities in the United States, 60 produced more than half of the students who later earned doctorates in the humanities. It would be fair to assume that these 60 colleges are strongly oriented toward the humanities, that they have competent faculties and good libraries, and that their graduates are well equipped for advanced study.

A quick look at the proportions of graduate students enrolled in the various disciplines may also be rewarding. In the decade from 1938 to 1947, the average annual enrollment in the humanities constituted 17.8 percent of the total, second only to the physical and biological sciences, compared with 15.3 percent in the social sciences, 11.5 percent in education, and only 1.9 percent in engineering. By 1952 these proportions had radically changed.

There was a decline to 13.5 percent in the humanities; education and

the social sciences reached the same figure, 14.7 percent; and engineering showed a phenomenal increase to 7.0 percent. Since 1952 the humanities have remained constant at between 13.0 and 13.2 percent, showing that their absolute growth kept steady pace with the total pace in graduate enrollments. This constancy seems surprising in view of the very meager financial support that these students in the past have received, contrasted to the massive sums in other fields. It makes me wonder how important or unimportant such subsidies may be, and it gives me the uneasy feeling that some of our most persuasive arguments in the promotion of the Humanities Foundation may have been less than valid.

But enough of these dull statistics; they serve only to establish the physical outline of our student's profile. Let's look at him as a human being, and here I draw upon no sources except upon a lifetime of contact with him. It seems to me that the radical difference between the young humanist and the young graduate in other areas is that the latter is vocation-oriented, the former subject-oriented. The latter is drawn to a profession; he thinks of himself as a doctor, lawyer, engineer, physicist, or chemist. The former does not think of himself as a humanist. He would be surprised if you suggested it to him. He may, at best, have a vague idea that he might be a professor, but even that idea comes to him later. At some time in his undergraduate years this young person has fallen in love with literature or music or art; he has enjoyed mastering foreign languages; he has been drawn to the intricate speculations of philosophy; and he pursues these studies for the love of them, for the pleasure that they give him, and not with the thought that they may eventually provide a vocation by which he will earn a living.

When this young person enters the graduate school, he naively expects to continue his pleasant pursuit of broad learning in the same wide-ranging, freewheeling style as before. And now he is rudely awakened to the realities of graduate education. In the first place, his professors take it for granted that he is preparing himself to be a college teacher. After all, why else is he here? What else can he do with philosophy or literature but teach? It may be the first time in his life that he has seriously faced this prospect, and he is disturbed that the subject, which until now has been his pleasant intellectual companion, is becoming his stern taskmaster. The broad field of his interests disintegrates into a mass of minutiae. He is expected to learn to use what we inelegantly call the tools of scholarship—bibliography, methodology, historiography. Unless

he is particularly fortunate in his choice of professors, he also learns how to dissect poetry and prose as the scientist dissects a frog or crayfish and to dry and mount thoughts and ideas as the botanist dries and mounts specimens in his herbarium. After a year or two of this, he is disillusioned and is either unhappy or resigned. In either case he plods along, becoming more and more of a specialist, until he finds or is thrust upon a reasonably congenial thesis topic on which he can demonstrate his technical skills. And the longer he can, with the competent aid of his thesis director, drag out the completion of that opus, the longer he postpones the evil day when he must leave these ivied halls for others just like them.

Forgive me for painting a dismal picture; but I have seen it all too often, and so have you. The WOODROW WILSON NEWSLETTER of June 1965 printed an essay by a graduate student of English in a major university from which I would like to quote a few lines. He writes:

> I do not know a single serious graduate student who is not profoundly dissatisfied with graduate school . . . . The real dissatisfaction is rooted in the academic program, and although much of it is focused on relatively minor obstacles like language exams or specific course requirements, I am certain that the impulse to what I would call narrow professionalism is the core of the problem.

Now I am willing to concede that this young man is profoundly dissatisfied and many others probably also are. And I will concede that the narrow professionalism of which he speaks is unfortunately an ingredient in many graduate programs. But I do not believe that this student has correctly analyzed his problem and that of his department. I truly believe that this young man's unhappiness is the result of his failure to distinguish between the values that reside in good literature and art and music and the values associated with their study. He loves—or at least once loved—literature for itself but never gave much thought to its relevance to contemporary society. Or, to put it more bluntly, he is substantially unable to justify the study of the subjects that attracted him so strongly.

I am not critical of this student; it is to his credit that he is unhappy and not resigned. Nor am I particularly critical of his professors for not helping him to clarify his thoughts. It is by no means a simple matter to explain, even to oneself, clearly and succinctly the values inherent in the

humanities and their crucial relevance to the needs of society. But I am critical of teachers of the humanities who permit their preoccupation with the minutiae of scholarship to blind them to their primary responsibility to interpret the past to the present and the present to itself and to make the whole of contemporary civilization accessible, in fact, to help give civilization its purpose and direction.

It is no news that much of the criticism of graduate education in the United States centers chiefly around the humanities and, to a lesser extent, around the social sciences. The complaints voiced by our unhappy Woodrow Wilson Fellow have been the subject of scores of books, articles, and speeches by many qualified—and sometimes less qualified—critics within and without the educational Establishment. They criticize the overspecialization in graduate training, the proliferation and fragmentation of courses into ever more minute units, the trivial character of dissertation topics, and the insistence upon squeezing the last piddling drops of juice out of a lemon that was not worth squeezing in the first place, and finally the inordinate length of time that the unfortunate student spends on the completion of the doctorate. These are certainly valid criticisms, but they are generally directed against the symptoms of the malady that has afflicted the humanities rather than to the malady itself. Occasionally a critic looks beyond the immediate ills and touches the core of the trouble. In 1959 Earl J. McGrath wrote:

> With the rise of the graduate school, liberal education became oriented to new goals foreign to its nature. The humanities shifted their interests from teaching to research; from instruction concerned with the key ideas of Western culture to instruction composed of the latest findings in ever narrower areas of scholarly investigation; from a concern with the complete development of mind and character to the cultivation of the professional skills and the restricted subject matter of the various fields of intellectual endeavor.

It would lead us much too far afield to show that even Professor McGrath's analysis does not go deep enough. For the erosion of the humanities did not begin with the rise of graduate education; it began almost a century ago under the impact of the burgeoning natural sciences upon the entire educational structure. With astonishment and admiration the humanist observed the effectiveness of the research techniques of the scientists and the satisfaction that comes with measurable and demonstrable results. He can hardly be criticized for trying to adopt

and adapt the analytical and empirical techniques that serve the natural scientist so well and with such reliable results. And he could scarcely have foreseen the ruinous effects of these techniques on humanistic scholarship unless he had perceived with great clarity that the scientist deals with facts and the humanist with values and judgments.

So much for the ills of the past and the present. Let us turn our eyes briefly to a brighter future, for after all the topic I have chosen is the renascence, not the demise, of the humanities. In 1960 Oliver Carmichael wrote:

> The humanities have two basic objectives: The one is disciplinary; the other, a knowledge and understanding of one's heritage. The achievement of each involves the development of values. The disciplinary aim is to develop intellectual interest and initiative and an appreciation of the various methods of communication, such as literature, music, art, and drama. On the other hand, knowledge and appreciation of our past are essential to a humanistic program, as also are the ideas and ideals upon which our culture rests.

These sentences may well serve as a motto for the rejuvenation, or the reorientation, of humanistic education and scholarship. They state the conviction that humanistic research should be concerned with human thoughts and relations as expressed in language, literature, the fine arts, history, and philosophy. Happily, if we look closely, we see the harbingers of this rejuvenation all about us.

The first of these is the development toward interdisciplinary study in the humane fields and the growing acceptance of interdisciplinary degrees. Some twenty-five or thirty years ago the first timid attempts were made to secure recognition for programs leading to degrees in comparative literature. These attempts generally were impeded by the rigidity of departmental lines and departmental requirements. Departments of English, French, German, or Italian professed great willingness to entertain dissertations in comparative literature, but each insisted upon its pound of flesh in the form of the full requirements of its own Ph.D. program. The few hardy individuals who survived this ordeal found themselves at the end with a degree for which there was no ready market. Today some forty universities have flourishing programs in comparative literature; their degrees are widely accepted, and their graduates find ample opportunity for employment. Let it be said as a footnote that the NDEA Title IV program deserves great credit for its farsighted support that speeded the development of these programs.

A further extension of interdisciplinary co-operation is found in the many area programs now in operation. Born of wartime necessity for the intensive training of persons in the languages, geography, economics, history, and customs of foreign areas, many of these programs have now grown into study centers or institutes for both training and research. Today there is scarcely an area in the world that is not represented by graduate programs in several universities. Moreover, their graduates find a ready market for their degrees. Specialists in African Studies, for example, are in such short supply and long demand that it is hard to keep track of them as they move from one high bidder to the other.

American Studies, broadly based in half a dozen or more disciplines whose departmental lines were sacrosanct even ten years ago, are well established in many universities. Their graduates at both the master's and the doctoral levels are in greater demand right now than those in conventional American literature.

Folklore, one of the broadest of interdisciplinary fields, has become a respected topic of study and research. Twenty-five years ago there was no professor of folklore in the United States, no major university in which a degree in folklore could be earned. In the late 1940's a few leading universities initiated interdepartmental curricula in folklore, generally involving departments of English, foreign languages, and anthropology. Today more than a dozen universities have distinguished folklore programs, including besides the previously named departments, art, history, linguistics, music, philosophy, psychology, and theater arts.

History departments, once the citadels of departmental segregation, have opened their gates and collaborate in the history of law, medicine, science, even engineering and industrial design. In several universities joint professorial appointments in history and medicine or history and law are now possible.

It is hardly necessary even to mention the phenomenal burgeoning of language studies, fostered to a great extent by NDEA Title VI support but well started even before these subsidies became available. Until 1950 the most neglected of humane disciplines, its new growth began without Federal support. By 1959 there were 19 centers for the study of esoteric languages; by 1963 there were 55. This year one large state university alone offers courses in 115 foreign languages, while throughout the country almost 10,000 graduate students are enrolled in courses in the so-called neglected languages.

These are some of the signs of spring in the air. Many more could be pointed out, but time presses me to say a few words about the new National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities, with which the 89th Congress has presented us. It, too, is a sign of spring, a token of the recognition on the part of the Federal Government that the humanities and the arts have a vital relevance to the needs of our society and that their support is indeed in the national interest, as the preamble to the establishing Act says. The Foundation can be expected to provide material support, on a modest scale perhaps, in the form of fellowships, grants for study, research, and travel, subsidies for publication, financing of institutes, symposiums, experimental programs, and in many other forms. But I shall not dwell on the happy prospect of improved economic status of our colleagues and students and of the humanities in general. I shall not dilate upon what the Foundation can do for us. On the contrary, I shall earnestly remind you of the responsibilities it places on us.

In an address in Washington in December 1965, Barnaby C. Keeney, Chairman of the Council and Endowment for the Humanities, said:

> The purpose of the Congress is clearly not simply to support the activities of learned men in the humanities . . . . It is hoped that programs will be developed which will bring the humanities and the arts to a major segment of our lay population and that the results will be better understanding and control of our society and amelioration of the conditions under which we live. Therefore I believe that we must consider the relevance of each proposal to the public welfare and to the national interest, for Congress would not and should not have passed the legislation if it had not believed that the accomplishment of its purposes was for the public welfare and in the national interest.
>
> We have told the Congress and the Nation that the welfare of a democracy requires on the part of its citizens substantial agreement on those fundamental moral and social ideas, the sum total of which constitutes the national ideal. We have told the Congress that the moral, ethical, and esthetic values inherent in the humanities and the arts are of central importance to the understanding of our national ideal. And we asked the Congress for the means to render a greater service in the development of those qualities that make us as a nation more humane, more understanding, more appreciative of truth and beauty.
>
> We have been given these means; we have been charged with this trust. It is now our solemn responsibility to carry it out.